

# **Institutions, mobility and resilience in the Fante migratory fisheries of West Africa**

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## **Indexing terms**

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# 1. Introduction

Through their spatial mobility, African fishermen and fish traders explore and exploit new niches: primarily fishing grounds and fish markets (see Chauveau 1991). Ghanaian canoe fishermen are among the groups most famous for such activity. In the twentieth century, they migrated extensively in coastal West Africa, reaching as far as Mauritania to the north and Congo to the south in order to fish in areas where the local fishermen have under-exploited their fishing grounds, and markets are unsaturated with fish (Delauney 1991; Boujou 2000). These migrants' contributions in their host countries in terms of technological innovation in the fisheries, in terms of new knowledge and institutions, and not the least in terms of food supply, are increasingly being documented (Haakonsen and Diaw 1991; Chauveau, Jul-Larsen and Chaboud 2000).

It has often been taken for granted that small-scale African fishermen migrate primarily because of population pressure resulting in land shortage and over-fishing. Jorion (1988), for example, wrote that “no one ever becomes a full-time maritime fisherman other than under duress” (Ibid:152) and described “circumstances [among Anlo-Ewe in Ghana and Xwla (Popo) in Togo and Benin] being precisely that of localised overpopulation leading to a type of colonising behaviour” whereby – as a risk-minimising strategy – fishermen would migrate to other coastal areas in West Africa with a “still underpopulated self-subsistence oriented milieu” (Ibid:132). This view has been contested, as it has been documented that fishermen migrate for a number of other reasons that are more opportunity-seeking than merely an escape from misery. This paper seeks to look into why migration has become such an integral part of Ghanaian canoe fisheries and to explain why migration has continued to be a successful strategy.

Above all, West African fishermen migrate in order to accumulate material wealth (Nukunya 1989; Odotei 1991d; Jul-Larsen 1994). Long-term stays away from social and economic obligations towards the extended family at home makes saving possible. In the case of migrant fishermen and fish traders from our case study site Moree, which is a Fante fishing town near Cape Coast in the Central Region of Ghana, their primary goal is to invest these savings in their home town in order to enhance the well-being of their *ebusua* (matrilineage) as well as their own personal prestige (see Overå 1998). Therefore, most of the *ebusua fie* (lineage or family houses) in Moree have been built – in a gradual process over several years – by networks of oscillating family members periodically returning from one or several

migration destinations, usually retiring after long migrant careers in the house they have contributed to building. Migration in certain stages of one's life cycle is thus seen as part of becoming a professional fisherman or fish trader and, moreover, provides an opportunity for self-realisation through access to natural, economic and social resources beyond one's local community, which – if accumulated – can be reinvested at home.

The opportunities provided by migration are created by environmental, economic and political circumstances. Hence, fishermen often migrate according to the movements of the fish stocks they exploit. This is the case for the seasonal migration in the Ghanaian “herring” (*sardinella aurita*) fishery, where fishing effort in the canoe sector largely follows the annual upwelling pattern in the Gulf of Guinea (Koranteng 1996 and 2000). However, whereas seasonal migration to a large extent is resource-related, long-term and circular migration tends to be less dependent on the resource than on economic and political conditions. The fishery cannot, in other words, be seen in isolation from other sectors of the economy and socio-political context. For example, international migration often occurs in order to accumulate savings in a foreign country with a stronger currency than in one's own country, as Ghanaians have done in the CFA countries Togo, Benin and the Ivory Coast (Bortei-Doku Aryeetey 2000). High costs of inputs like petrol and oil may also inspire fishermen to fish in countries with lower prices. For example, frequent fluctuations in Ghana's policies on petroleum product subsidies<sup>1</sup> has been an important reason for Ghanaians to fish in Nigeria, where they can find cheaper petrol to fill in their outboard motors (Klein 1999). Ghanaian fishermen have also benefited from programmes subsidising fuel for fishermen in the Ivory Coast and Benin.

Rather than having been “pushed” away from their home area by population growth, land shortage and resource crisis, pull factors like those mentioned above have proved significant in the explanation of the rather extraordinary migration activity that has been observed in West Africa among Fante, Ga and Ewe fishermen from Ghana. Nevertheless, push factors within Ghana in the late twentieth century included overcrowding in homes and communities, dwindling profits from fishing, and high

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<sup>1</sup> A subsidy on “premix” (mixture of petrol and oil for outboard motors) was introduced in 1992 but was withdrawn in 1994 because of smuggling, it was sold to taxi drivers, etc. The subsidy on premix was introduced again in 1996. This time a coloured chemical was added to make it impossible to use for anything else than outboard motors. It is quite interesting to note, firstly, that this subsidy was introduced at a time when the general SAP policy was supposed to reduce subsidies and, secondly, that both of the times when this happened, there were presidential elections in Ghana (in 1992 and 1996).

costs of living. This has happened in a context of economic liberalisation, a policy that Ghana has followed according to IMF-directives since 1983.

Increasingly, migrants also face constraints in their utilisation of fisheries and market niches when they travel abroad to some parts of West Africa. To some extent these constraints are related to pressure on fish resources (largely by the international industrial fishing fleet), but mostly the constraints have been linked to political conflicts, both at local and national levels. One can mention the expulsion of one million Ghanaians from Nigeria in the early 1980s and the civil wars in Liberia and Sierra Leone in the 1990s. For example, before the war in Liberia, Ghanaian migrants were responsible for 90 per cent of the country's artisanal fish catch (Haakonsen 1988). The fishermen who caught this fish and the traders who were involved in processing had to escape from the war in 1990, and very few, if any, have returned to Liberia. Another example of political conflict affecting migrant fishermen is the regular hostility against migrants by Ivorian authorities. During the fieldwork for this paper, people in Moree were very concerned about the conflict that had taken place in December 1998 between Ivorians and fishing migrants in Sassandra – one of Moree's most important migration destinations in the Ivory Coast. Seven Ghanaian fishermen, of which two were from Moree, were killed in a conflict that started with a fight over the presence of Ghanaian nets and canoes in a prohibited area (near a wharf), but which soon involved the whole community and invoked the tensions between Ivorians and migrants in general.

As these few examples show, migrants must relate to a complex set of opportunities and constraints in their multi-locational exploitation of fishing and market niches. In this paper it is argued that migration is an adaptation to an environment where resource access is seasonal and also fluctuates with long-term trends; where population growth is high; where production is vulnerable to increases in the costs of inputs; and where market demand is high while purchasing power among consumers is poor. However, rather than seeing migration simply as a response to population-, biological- or financial crises, migration is here viewed as a strategy whereby fisher people – through their spatial mobility – seek to make the most out of the biological, social and economic resources that are within their reach.

Crucial for the ability of fishermen and traders to engage in the strategy of spatial mobility is the existence of social and political institutions in both home communities and migration destinations that can facilitate their movements in terms of mobilisation of capital and labour for a migration trip; provision of information about cultural codes in the host community and about the legal requirements, fishing restrictions and

bureaucratic procedures of foreign governments; negotiation of internal and external conflicts; maintenance of links with relatives at home and social belonging abroad; and support in case of sickness and death. “Replication” in the migration context of home-grown organising principles in marriages, clans and lineages, chief systems, religion, apprentice and credit systems has served such purposes.

Replication and diffusion of institutions and values have important implications for people’s ability to migrate. In the case of Fante fishermen and traders Irene Odotei actually indicates that their possibility of relating to Fante institutions when they travel has led to the development of what she calls a “migrating mentality” (Odotei 1991d:173), which “is enhanced by the existence of the clan system among the Fante and other Akan groups which transcends state or town barriers. A member of a clan is welcomed by another clan member and treated as a family member regardless of his or her state or town of origin” (Ibid.). This is in line with many other studies that have shown that participation in networks and institutions where “trust can be trusted” is vital for migrants’ possibilities to “make it”, whether we are talking about Hausa traders in West Africa (Cohen 1969), Chinese traders in Singapore (Menkhoff 1994), or Sicilians in New York (Gambetta 1993).

This paper will examine the crucial role that social and political institutions in a local community, Moree, and its migration network within and beyond Ghana (where it is often connected economically and institutionally to a wider Ghanaian migrant community), play in fishermen and traders’ ability to pursue migration as a strategy. It is argued that the outcome of a spatially extensive but institutionally efficient migratory production system such as the Fante fisheries, is an extremely flexible utilisation of resources, which is well adapted to the West African biological, economic and political environment. Furthermore, it is suggested that because of this flexibility, Ghanaian canoe fisheries is a particularly resilient system (see Adger 2000), which explains its extraordinary ability to adapt to and absorb biological resource fluctuations, population increase, and economic and political shocks in the region.

## **2. Spatial extension of the social field of fishing**

Considering the organisational experience, geographical knowledge, technological expertise and material wealth that fisher migrants have accumulated over the years, it becomes clear that migration in itself has become an institution in Ghanaian canoe

fisheries. The term for migration in Fante is *adoom*, which means to move to a new place in order to work (i.e. to fish or to process/sell fish) for a minimum time span of one month. This term is used with reference to migration in order to fish both within Ghana and abroad, and for migration to a market town in order to sell fish, as women do when they stay for three or four months in Kumasi to sell smoked fish that they receive from Moree during the bumper season (see Overå 1992; Clark 1994). Migration is in other words something else than short market trips or fishing trips, let alone all the visiting of relatives and travelling to funerals, and so forth, in which Ghanaians engage themselves all the time. So common is it for fishermen and traders to be on the move that most of them have their personal name and the name of their home town tattooed on their under-arm in order to be sure they are brought home if they die or fall sick while away.

As a consequence of the extensive migration that people have been involved in for many generations, the social and economic network of Moree fishermen and fish traders extends far beyond their home town. A clear indication of the social importance of this network is Bortei-Doku Aryeetey's (2000:37) finding that 71% of the migrants in her Moree survey said that they travel to places where they already know someone (in most cases a relative). Such networks transcend national borders and can be analysed on various scales: One can identify networks of Ghanaian fisheries migrants that extend to most countries in coastal West Africa. These networks can further be distinguished according to ethnicity into Fante, Ga or Ewe networks. One can also identify networks of migrants originating from one particular village, and even from one particular lineage or clan. Indeed, every lineage in Moree has its own fishing migration history, often physically manifested in one or several houses.

I will analyse the fisheries of Moree as a social field, which on an aggregated level is part of the Fante field of fisheries, which ultimately is part of the field of Ghanaian canoe fisheries. Social fields are here seen as regional systems; empirical systems of social interconnections that vary in scale and in structural complexity (Grønhaug 1978). The scale, or size, of a field is the number of people involved and extension in social space (Ibid:79). Structural complexity is related to the number of roles and ways of combining roles into social persons. Hence, a person can be a member of many social fields (such as fishing, religious systems, trade networks, kinship networks and political parties) simultaneously. One's role and participation in one field may thus influence one's "level of resources" (Ibid:115) in another field.



Migration networks may aptly be analysed as social fields in that they “vary from well-defined corporate groups to mere aggregates of interrelated actors who themselves may be unaware of the social interlinking among themselves” (Ibid:81). A social field can extend from a local to a global scale, and I see them as regional systems where “social relations stretch out in space” on various geographical scales and where “localities in a sense can be present in one another” (Massey 1994:7). This approach is useful in conceptualising the replication and diffusion of local institutions to migration destinations in the context of West African fisheries. Institutions could here be viewed in the sense that Bierschenk and Olivier de Sardin (1997) talk about “arenas”; the social space which is immediately adjacent to the field and which contains the repertory of values, meanings and resources that the actors of the field possess, together with the relationship among them (Ibid:240). Moree and its “satellite” communities could thus be seen as arenas – places of both confrontation and interaction on common issues (Ibid.) – that are localised manifestations of the wider Fante field of fishing.

If we define the spatial extension of the Fante field of fishing (including its markets), it extends far beyond the Fante coastal towns in Ghana (see Maps 1 and 2). For example, an important arena in the Fante field of fishing is Abidjan in the Ivory Coast. There are many – mainly Ghanaian – fishing communities in the lagoon areas of Abidjan. In most of these communities there are distinctly Fante, Ewe and Ga living quarters. In the case of the Fante, every major Fante fishing community in Ghana is represented with a “satellite” community in Abidjan, with their own elected chief. The cluster of migrants from Moree in Abidjan is known as Osibisa. People from Moree thus refer to the Moree chief in Osibisa, as well as to the Fante chief (who is from Elmina) of all Fante migrants in Abidjan. The Ewe and Ga also have their own chiefs. Finally, the President of the Ghana House of Chiefs in Abidjan is, in collaboration with the Ghanaian ambassador, the Ghanaian migrants’ – irrespective of ethnicity or occupation – link towards the Ivorian government. Similar living arrangements and institutions representing fisheries migrants can be found in for example Cotonou in Benin (Odotei 1991b) and Pointe Noire in Congo (Jul-Larsen 1994).

The Fante field of fishing also extends to the most important markets. In Kumasi, which is the main market destination of fish from Moree, there is a quarter called Fante New Town. This place evolved and got its name when Fante fish traders increasingly began to supply the numerous blue- and white-collar workers who were posted in Kumasi after British conquest of the Asante in 1874 (Clark 1994:237). Similarly, traders can be identified in most other West African markets according to

the commodity in which they specialise, and according to their country of origin, ethnic group, language and village (specificity dwindles with increasing distance of the market from the trader's home area). The fish traders have their own leaders who negotiate in conflicts amongst themselves and act as their representatives in relation to other trader groups, city councils, the police and so on.

The Fante migrants thus bring along local institutions to new locations: Kinship ideologies, religious practices, marriage practices, credit institutions, gender division of labour, and their practices of mobilising and organising labour in fishing and fish processing, and for sharing of economic output. Institutions and practices are maintained, modified and redefined according to the circumstances, but – importantly – any person who grew up in a Fante fishing community in Ghana is able to acquire a role in the Fante migrant setting and will know what kind of behaviour this role requires. In most cases the migrant will be easily identifiable by the leaders of the migrant community according to social statuses such as name, lineage membership, *asafo* membership (local associations to which I shall return), and place of origin. The leaders of migrant communities can therefore socially, economically and culturally “locate” a newcomer in a quite detailed manner, and they know which institutions and persons to contact in the migrant's home town in case of trouble or emergency. A person's position (i.e. status and role in a number of interconnected social fields) in his or her home town will therefore be quite decisive for his or her role repertoire as a migrant: One's role and access to resources in one field or location (such as position in lineage at home) may influence one's role and access to resources in another (such as access to credit and other relations of trust abroad).

In theory, people can move, work and trade between their home community and one or several migrant communities in a “Fante field of fishing” that stretches all over coastal West Africa. In practice, constraints in the various interconnected social fields with which the fisheries is intertwined on various levels (from family to state) and locations (home and abroad) may hinder migrants' physical and social mobility. Nevertheless, it seems clear that the fairly well organised institutions and their socialising effect on modes of behaviour is enabling for migrants in their strategies to get access to resources beyond their home town: The “transparency” of the migrant communities makes social control among the members possible to such a degree that it can “speak with one voice” and appear as one political institution in a foreign context. Thus, while the replication of institutions from home to some degree limit migrants' individual behaviour and their maximisation of the output of resource exploitation, the institutions have also been a precondition for Ghanaian migrants' ability to utilise their fishing and marketing expertise in new niches abroad. Let us

now briefly look back at how the Ghanaian fisheries migration in West Africa historically evolved.

### **3. A brief history and geography of Fante fisheries migration**

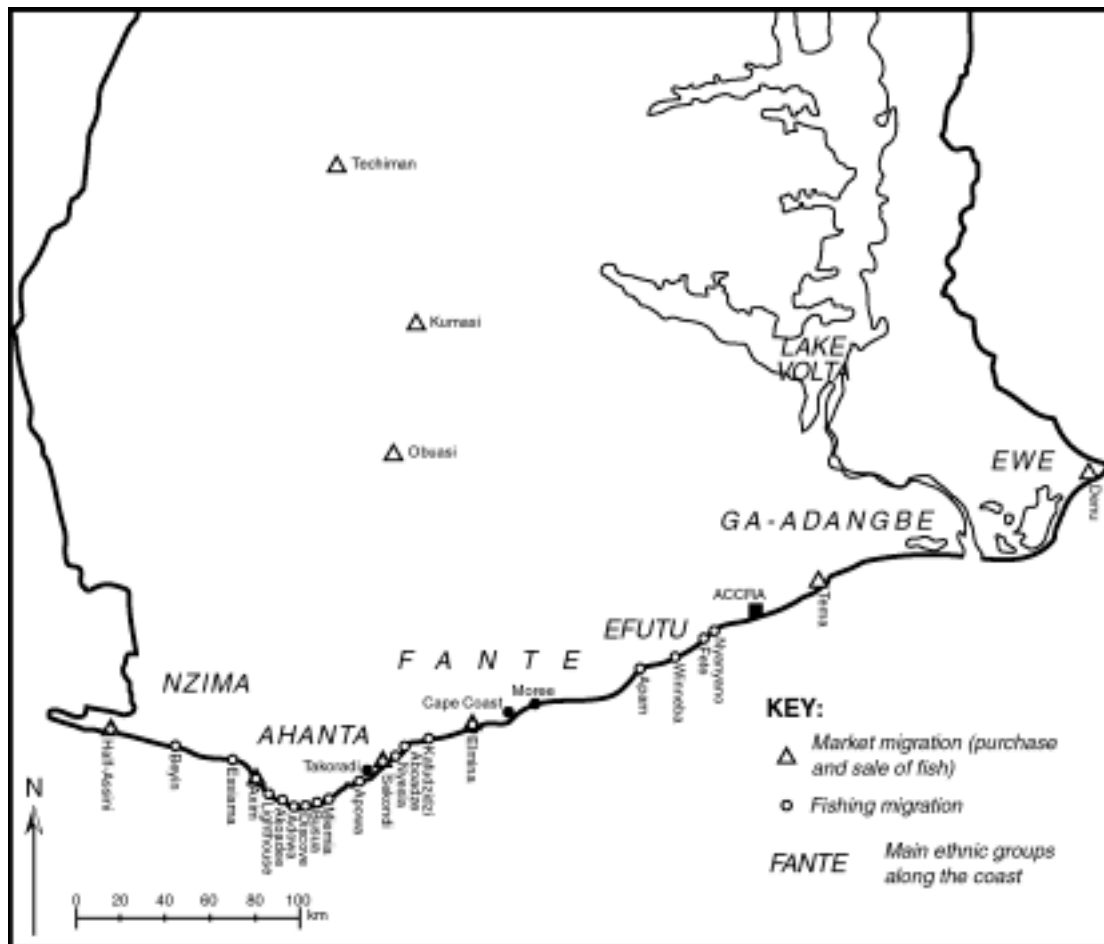
#### **3.1. Coastal mobility**

Along the coast of Ghana people have been fishing in rivers and lagoons since long before Europeans started writing about it in the fifteenth century. According to Robin Law (1989) it is unlikely that marine fishing and coastal trade by sea developed before the arrival of European traders. For lack of natural harbours in West Africa, the Europeans had to hire fishermen as so-called canoemen to transport people and goods from their ships across the rough surf to the beaches and vice versa. The coastal population already had dugout canoes, but since these canoes had to be modified in order to get them across the surf, Law (Ibid:230) assumes that the canoes were not used for sea-faring earlier. The canoemen's and later fishermen's selective adoption of European technology, such as the sail and the beach seine (Ibid:232), enabled them to fish further out in the sea and to catch larger catches.

Whether Fante fishermen were marine fishers before the arrival of Europeans or not, their extensive involvement as canoemen working for the Europeans had as a consequence that they became well familiarised with the coast. The canoemen also organised themselves in companies either working on a regular basis for a particular trading company, or hiring themselves out loading and unloading goods for various ships. This experience was probably very important for the way fishermen came to organise themselves in fishing companies (see Hill 1970; Gutkind 1989; Nukunya 1989; Jul-Larsen 1994). The canoemen were also employed in such great numbers that they established their own communities. In Aneho (in today's Togo), for example, the Fante canoemen established a community with their own leaders probably as early as in 1650 (Law 1989:219). Their type of organisation was quite similar to today's organisation of migrant fishing communities. Through their experience as canoemen, the Fante also gained more knowledge about the seasonal movements of fish and about fish markets, and they established social and commercial contacts that could serve as entry points to these resources and niches.

### 3.2. Migration in the Gold Coast/Ghana

When Fante canoemen and fishermen began to engage themselves in marine fishing, they migrated both seasonally and for more permanent settlement. In *A New and Accurate Description of the Coast of Guinea*, William Bosman in 1721 writes that there were thousands of Fante fishermen who, in addition to fishing, used their canoes in trade along the coast (Christensen 1977:2). Between the late 1700s and mid 1800s the Fante introduced sea-fishing to other peoples along the coast (i.e. Ga-Adangbe and Anlo-Ewe), who were mainly farmers supplementing their diet with fish from lagoons and rivers (Lawson and Kwei 1974; Vercruijssse 1984; Robertson 1984; Jorion 1988). Seasonal and long-term migration has thus been an integral part of Fante fisheries for at least two hundred years. The main destination for early Fante fisheries migration was the area between Axim and Accra (Odotei 1991a).



Map 1. The most common destinations within Ghana for fisheries migration from Moree in the 1990s.  
Source: Bortei-Doku 2000; Overå 1992, 1998; Field data 1999.

As Map 1 above shows, this area corresponds to the present migration pattern of fishermen from Moree who benefit from the *sardinella* fishery, which also today is largely determined by seasonal upwellings.

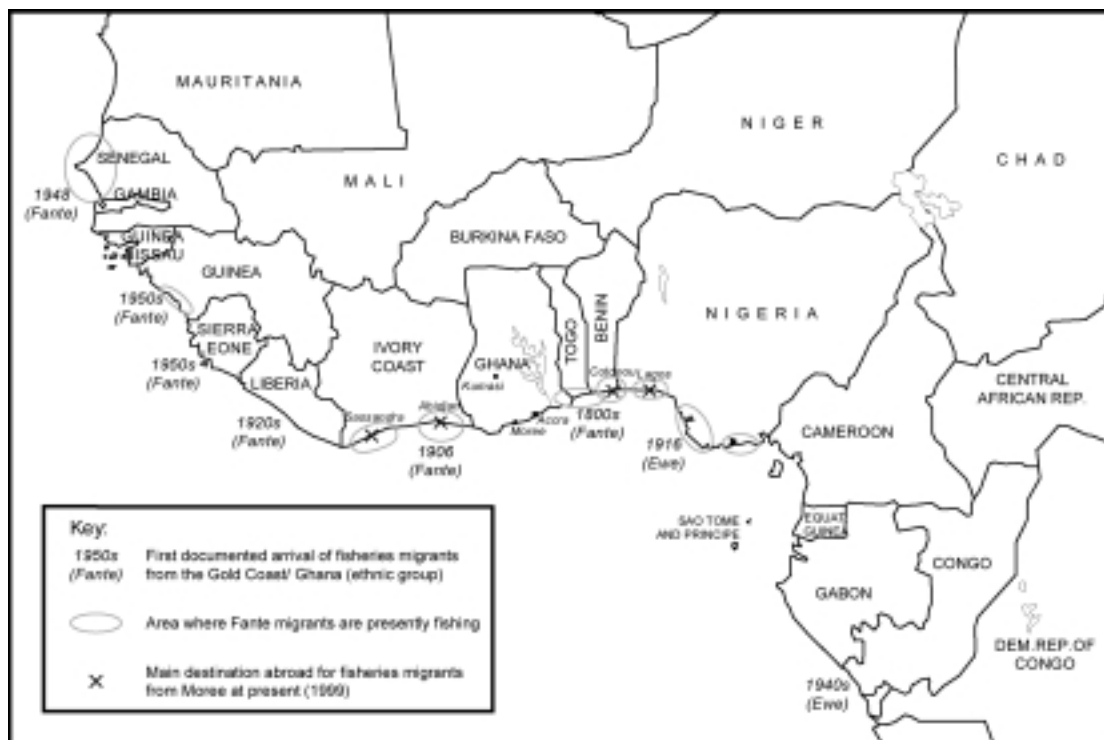
The early migrants brought with them new technology like new types of canoes, nets and fishing techniques, and institutions like the chief fisherman (*apofohene*) and, more recently (twentieth century), fish traders' leaders (*konkohene*). But the migrants also had to adapt to new environmental and cultural contexts. Over time, those who settled permanently in new areas within Ghana have become fully integrated, both linguistically and socially (Odotei 1991d:171). Nevertheless, their descendants, who often hold prominent fishery-related positions, can still be recognised by their Fante names. For example, the name of the chief fisherman of all Ga fishermen is Abew Chiriquanda, which shows his Fante origin (Ibid.). Another visible trace of early Fante migration can be found in the Ga fishing town Labadi (in Accra), where there is a quarter called Abese Fante that consists of migrants who are supposed to have come from Moree in the nineteenth century. As Irene Odotei puts it: "The fishermen came with their sister to cook for them. She married a local man and the group never returned" (Ibid.). Then, as now, seasonal migration often becomes permanent.

### **3.3. Early international migration**

Fisheries migration to countries beyond the borders of present Ghana is of a more recent origin, and was not to the same extent related to the seasonal *sardinella* fishery. Fante long-distance and long-term fisheries migration to countries like the Ivory Coast, Liberia, Guinea, Sierra Leone, Senegal, Togo, Benin, and Nigeria, began about one hundred years ago. The map below shows the historical expansion of fisher migrants from Ghana. It shows which ethnic group is documented to have arrived first along the West African coast. The map also shows the main areas in West Africa where Fante migrants are presently fishing, as well as the main migration destinations abroad in 1999 for migrants from Moree.

According to Karine Delauney (1991 and 1995), Fante expansion into the coastal areas of the Ivory Coast started at the beginning of the twentieth century. For a long period the Fante (and Nzima) had first and foremost been known as rubber traders in the Ivory Coast, but when this trade collapsed many of them invested in fisheries (Delauney 2000:106). Through the finance of these traders, Fante fishermen and fish traders (who already for a long time had been migrating to the Nzima coast [see Map 1] and thereby must have known many Nzima traders) could invest in equipment and

travel to start fishing in the Ivory Coast, where marine fish resources were largely unexploited (Ibid.).



Map 2. Early fishing migration from Gold Coast/Ghana to coastal West Africa, and present destinations for Fante migration. Sources: Field data 1999; Boujou 2000; Delauney 1995; Everett 1991; Haakonsen 1991; Ijff 1991; Jul-Larsen 1994; Nguiringuri 1991; Odotei 1991d; Wagner 1991.

The fish was marketed in Abidjan and on plantations, but some of the fish was also transported into Ghana by Fante women who co-operated with the fishermen<sup>2</sup>. Other groups of fishing migrants arrived later. Ewe beach seine fishermen have been in the Abidjan area since the 1930s, while Ga line fishermen started settling there in the 1970s<sup>3</sup>. Their main attraction were the new markets for fish that evolved with the need to feed workers as the Ivory Coast developed extensive plantation agriculture (Delauney 2000).

Through step migration, fisher people gradually continued to settle further westwards. The first Fante fishermen started coming to Liberia in the 1920s<sup>4</sup> (Haakonsen 1991:140), whereas their arrival further west in the 1940s and 1950s have been documented in Sierra Leone (Wagner 1991), Guinea (Boujou 2000:260) and Gambia (Everett 1991:75). The local population in these areas did not fish much, except from

<sup>2</sup> See Overå (1998:70) for an account by an old woman in Moree who traded fish from Sassandra to Kumasi in the 1930s.

<sup>3</sup> According to Odotei (1991c:53), the first Ga fishermen arrived in Abidjan in 1964.

in the lagoons, and with the development of harbours in Monrovia, Freetown and Conakry, Ghanaian fishermen found new opportunities in new urban fish markets.

Towards the east, as in Benin, the Anlo-Ewe was the first group of migrant fishermen to start settling in the 1920s. They were later followed by Ada and Fante fishermen (Diaw 1992:65). Ewe fishermen were also the first to arrive in Nigeria (Ijff 1991:255) and Congo (Nguiringuri 1991:283). In these areas, the fisheries migrants were informed and supported financially by relatives who already were established merchants, and who therefore knew that there was a need for the fish supply that their relatives could provide (see Jul-Larsen 1994).

Until the 1960s when the outboard motor became a major innovation in Ghanaian canoe fisheries (see Lawson and Kwei 1974; Vercrujse 1984; Hernæs 1991; Odotei 1991a; Overå 1998), fishermen travelled to the new destinations in cargo- and passenger ships. They simply put the canoe, the crew and their families on board and travelled for example from the harbour in Takoradi, which was built in 1926, to Abidjan. The establishment of shipping lines was thus an important precondition for the fishermen to migrate long distances with their equipment<sup>5</sup>. Today, fishermen mostly travel in their own 30-60 feet long canoes with 40 hp outboard motors, while those of their family members who join them travel by road (or air). It takes 3-4 days to travel by canoe from Moree to Abidjan and 5-6 days to Sassandra. The outboard motor has thus made it possible to travel to more distant destinations abroad as well as to travel further and more frequently on seasonal migration within Ghana.

To sum up, it is timely to point out that in the literature there are very few indications that the flows of fisheries migrants from Ghana to other countries in West Africa has been initiated by population pressure or over-exploitation of resources in coastal areas. Much indicates that the increasing number of migrants were drawn to foreign coasts by the processes of commercialisation and urbanisation that accelerated in the first half of the twentieth century in coastal West Africa. Particularly important were the new markets for fish consumption that emerged with development of commercial agriculture, ports and shipping, and with the construction of infrastructure like roads and railways that made inland markets more accessible.

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<sup>4</sup> According to one of Jorion's (1988) informants, the first migrant in Liberia was a Fante from Komenda who settled in Monrovia in 1914.

<sup>5</sup> Likewise, Jorion (1988:144) notes that when sea traffic between Takoradi in Ghana and Conakry in Guinea was interrupted in the 1970s, the Ghanaian fishery in Guinea came to an end. However, by the late 1980s Ghanaian fisheries migrants were drifting back into Guinea (Haakonsen 1988)

We shall now shift our focus to the present and to the local level. In the following I will present some of the institutions in Moree that are important for men and women's access to resources in the fishery based economy, and for local management of power and access to resources in general. Thereafter I will describe how these institutions have been "exported" in various forms through fisheries migration to new contexts in Ghana and abroad.

## **4. Social organisation and political institutions in Moree**

### **4.1. Matrilineage and marriage: labour, credit and exchange**

Fishing, processing and trade in Moree is largely organised through extended families (*fie*) that are sub-divisions of matrilineages (*abusua*), which again are subdivisions of the seven matrilineal Fante clans (*ebusua*). To build a *fie* for one's relatives (*fie* means both house/home and family) is therefore not only a matter of providing shelter and gaining prestige through "doing good", it is certainly also a way to mobilise labour (see Overå 1992). High fertility is thus seen as a necessity and a blessing. Mother, sisters and daughters co-operate in trade of fish, and during fishing periods, houses may actually appear as fish processing factories or workshops where all women and children – often with hired labour in addition – clean, smoke and pack fish day and night. The smoked fish is carried to the truck station and most of it is sent to the market in Kumasi (and other towns) by one of the women in the house. She personally travels with the fish to the market, or the fish is sent – with the truck driver as a trusted middleman – to a "sister" (relative or colleague) permanently or temporarily staying in Kumasi.

Married couples usually live apart, each in their own or matrilineal relative's *fie*. It is the duty of the wife to cook for the husband and bring the food to him in the evening. She stays with him overnight and goes back to her own *fie* in the morning. In polygynous marriages, the wives alternate – often with monthly intervals – in this arrangement. Husband and wife have separate purses, but do in various ways and to various degrees pool resources in the up-keep of their children. Marriage is also an inherent part of the fisheries, which is reflected in the gender division of labour: men fish and women trade. The right of a wife to buy fish through a husband is thus an important institution in the fishing economy.



Husbands are important sources of credit for women; they borrow money to buy fish, or, in the case of canoe owners' wives, they get fish on credit from his canoe. Moree has a large proportion of female canoe owners, and for them, loans from husbands have often been important in their ability to acquire a canoe. However, lineage members are also important sources of credit, and for women who enter the male dominated field of fishing, the co-operation of male lineage members is crucial in their management strategies. Hence, practically all women canoe owners in Moree have sons as captains (see Overå 1998).

Husbands also borrow money from their wives, not only for family provisions, but also when they buy canoes, outboard motors and petrol. As the canoe fisheries became more capital intensive with the introduction of larger nets and outboard motors in the 1960s, credit has become institutionalised in the *enam nyi* ("woman selling fish"): These women have accumulated substantial amounts of capital in fish trade, and can thus advance canoe owners with money to buy petrol for a particular fishing trip, and some of them lend out large amounts for the purchase of canoes, nets and outboard motors. The loans are usually interest-free, but the *enam nyi* benefits through a commitment by her customers to repay the loan in fish. Thereby her fish supply is secured, whereby she can make a profit.

#### 4.2. "Traditional" political institutions

As one informant put it, there are three main "stakeholders" or "power blocks" in Moree: 1) The *omanhene* (chief) and the *mpanyinfo* (lineage elders), 2) the *apofohene* (chief fisherman) and the *konkohene* (leader of women fish traders), and 3) the three *asafo* companies (former military divisions which are still important community organisations in Fante society). Ideally, there should be a power balance between these institutions<sup>6</sup>. Needless to say this balance is always contested and conflicts and negotiations always ongoing. In addition, political institutions introduced by the state are also part of this discourse.

##### *Chief*

The *omanhene* (chief) has a board of seven elders, the *beesonfo*: one for each of the seven Fante *ebusua* (clans). Under these, each lineage sub-division have an elder, the *abusua panyin*. The lineage plays an important role in all aspects of life in Moree, and

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<sup>6</sup> Personal communication with Ebenezer Ayesu at the Asafo Documentation Centre, Institute of African Studies, University of Ghana, Legon.

in many ways functions as a legal system. Cases of all kinds (from marriage conflicts to large debt claims) are brought before the *abusua panyin*, and depending on the seriousness of the issue, the case is brought upwards in the system until it reaches the *beesonfo* and the court of the chief.

The *omanhene* of Moree is always elected from the Akona *ebusua*, and he has the title Nana Adzekase. The right of the Akona clan to claim the chief title is based on a myth about the first settlement in Moree and the myth is still used in negotiations over rights to leadership<sup>7</sup>:

The hunter Adzekase was hunting in the Moree area when he suddenly saw thousands of people coming out of the sea. When he finally dared to reveal himself to them, the column of people stopped. Those who were still in the sea turned into rocks. These rocks, human in shape, can still be seen on the beaches of Moree. The leader of the people from the sea was called Asebu Amanfi. He was a giant and he was very fond of corn. Therefore, with the help of his sister who was constantly frying corn to feed him, Asebu Amanfi went searching for better farming land. He founded Asebu, and therefore Moree is still under the Asebu paramountcy. Asebu Amanfi had a brother, whose name was Farnyi Kwegya, which means “a man who goes fishing”. When he met the hunter Adzekase on the beach that day, they founded Moree. Nana Adzekase became the first chief of Moree and Farnyi Kwegya became the first chief fisherman. Farnyi Kwegya taught the people of Moree how to fish, and they became great fishermen.

### ***Chief fisherman***

As we see, the position of chief fisherman, *apofohene*, is also claimed through the myth about the founding of Moree. The position of *apofohene* is hereditary. However, the person is elected by the fishermen and must be an exceptionally experienced, wise and respected fisherman. As the chief, he also has a *beesonfo* (board of seven elders). The *apofohene's* duties range from negotiations between fishermen (for example if they destroy each other's gear); he negotiates in conflicts at the beach (for example between fishermen and fish buyers); he gives the fishermen advice. He is also the religious leader of the fishermen, and together with the priests of the Sea God (*Bosompo*) and of other gods that are relevant in the field of fisheries, he performs rituals to ensure good fishing.

The *apofohene* receives a token fee from fisher migrants who come to his town to land fish. He also raises some revenue from fines both when fishermen break religious taboos and if they break regulations he has been informed about by the Fisheries

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<sup>7</sup> For a more complete version of the myth, see Overå (1998:114-15).

Department (that is if, as I shall return to, he approves of the particular regulation in question). In the periods when “premix” for the outboard motors have been subsidised, the chief fisherman had the authority to issue licences to the beneficiaries and to distributors of the subsidised fuel.

Because of the importance of fishing in Moree, the *apofohene* has become Moree’s “link” to external resources. Compared with the chief, the chief fisherman has thus become a much more important economic and political institution. Perhaps the most important task of the *apofohene* through the last thirty to forty years has been to negotiate with the Fisheries Department and the Agricultural Development Bank to ensure that fishermen from Moree are given subsidised outboard motors on credit. Each time a new “portion” of motors was ready for distribution, the chief fishermen of each region negotiated and allocated a certain number of motors to their communities. The *apofohene* (at least in Moree) also considered which fishermen should be given loans to receive these outboard motors. The chief fisherman thus acted both as an adviser to the bank and as a guarantor for members of “his” community. As subsidies for outboard motors dried up in the 1990s, the Moree *apofohene* has shifted his focus to the private import companies, like Japan Motors, where he is involved in similar negotiations. Though the *apofohene* is quite successful in this endeavour, outboard motors now have to be bought at market prices, and it has become harder to get them on credit, so the affordability of Moree canoe owners to replace or acquire new outboard motors has diminished.

### *Asafo companies*

According to the myth, Farnyi Kwegya did not only become the first chief fisherman, he also founded the first *asafo* company in Moree: Bentsir. Therefore, an *apofohene* is always elected from the *asafo* company Bentsir No. 1. The second *asafo* company, Alata No. 2, was founded by slaves who built the fort in Anomabo. The third *asafo* company is called Nkum No. 3, and was founded by people who migrated to Moree. The *asafo* companies were ward-based military defence groups. According to Simensen (1974:26) *asafo* means “war (*osa*) people (*fo*)”, and furthermore it means “an organised body of commoners under joint leadership”. In Moree, there is no *tufuhene* (joint leader of all the *asafo* companies) as is found in many other towns. But each *asafo* company has a leader, the *supi*, as well as several *safohene*, who are leaders of divisions within the *asafo* company. Both men and women can be elected as *safohene*, and each company also have a women’s division, the *asafo akyere*.

Interestingly, in the Fante matrilineal setting, *asafo* membership is inherited by both men and women through the paternal line. It is also quite interesting to note that the canoemen who, as mentioned, worked for the Europeans were recruited from *asafo* companies (Gutkind 1989). This may be the reason why Ghanaian canoe crews for a long time have been known as “companies”, and such organisation along patrilineal principles are also to some extent reflected in the way canoe crews are recruited today. For example, the number of the *asafo* company that a canoe company belongs to is often written on its canoe. Because of its capacity to mobilise both labour and other types of support and collective action, the *asafo* have received renewed interest as a political force and democratic element in local communities (see Simensen 1974 and Hernæs 1998). The *asafo* companies can mobilise their members to perform communal labour, like building of roads and tidying up the town, and they mobilise their members in cases of fire or warn them when there is an outbreak of a disease, like cholera. Crime is often reported to the *supi* and his board of elders. The *asafo* companies organise elaborate annual festivals, and migrants travel long distances to attend the Abangye festival in August. The festivals provide an opportunity for migrants to retain strong links with their home town.

The *asafo* companies each control specific portions of land in Moree town and its outskirts. Even if the military days of the *asafo* are over, there is still a strong aspect of rivalry in the relationship between them (Sackey 1998). This is expressed in songs, the symbols of their flags, and in performances, thus the expression “*ye regoro asafo*” (“we are performing *asafo*”) (Sutherland-Addy 1998). Often the rivalry becomes political. Conflicts over access to resources and power, where the legitimacy of both *omanhene* and *apofohene* can be questioned, is of concern for *asafo* leaders who use their positions to mobilise their members’ support.

### ***Traders’ leader***

The Fante political system is, as in many other West African societies (Okonjo 1976, Amadiume 1997), dual-sex in nature. Moran (1990:167) explains that in a dual-sex type of status system both men and women are able to achieve social esteem via exclusively male and female channels, where age, entrepreneurial activity and control over resources grant prestige. This is reflected in the Fante (and other Akan) political structure. Hence, both the *omanhene*, the *apofohene* and the *asafo* companies have female leaders parallel to the male leaders. Generally, however, whereas the male leaders often make decisions in matters concerning society in general, women’s political domain tends to be limited to “women’s matters”. Nevertheless, even if women do not participate directly in political institutions to the same extent as men,

some of them have considerable economic power. In fact, large-scale fish traders and female canoe owners claim that it is “for fear of losing customers” that they do not get involved in politics (in public).

Because women are central in the fishery economy as traders and creditors, the *konkohene* (“the leader – or ‘queen’ – of those who sell fish”), has a powerful position. Together with her board of seven elders, the *konkohene* mediates in conflicts between the fish traders, and she negotiates the daily “beach price” of fish on behalf of the women. In conflicts between fishermen and women fish traders, their leaders – the *apofohene* representing the fishermen and the *konkohene* representing the traders – hear the case, negotiate, and decide upon which action to take in order to solve the matter. Furthermore, the *konkohene* is often called upon to give advice to the *apofohene*. Information also flows in the other direction; when the *apofohene* has information about issues that are of particular relevance for women, for example about credit programmes for fish processors and traders, he informs them through the *konkohene*. Interestingly, the *konkohene* in Moree complains that her influence has been eroded since many of the most influential fish traders now (since the late seventies and eighties) have become canoe owners: The *apofohene* has come to represent the interests of these women just as much as the *konkohene* does. Moreover, since the *apofohene* is recognised by the state and other external agencies as Moree’s representative in all fishery related matters, the *konkohene* has little influence beyond the female field of fish traders.

#### **4.3. The presence of the state and negotiation of local power**

The institutions that I have mentioned constitute what one could call traditional or indigenous Fante social organisation and political leadership. It has to be mentioned that religious institutions also play an important role in all the above mentioned political fora. This authority structure has constantly been changing through regional wars, colonialism, independence, state control and market liberalism. Such supra-local processes play a role in the power struggle between institutions at the local level. Power is continuously contested by the various parties and power relations are negotiated along differentiating axes of lineage, territory, gender and class<sup>8</sup>. At stake is honour, titles, prestige and rank, distribution of rights to land and other resources,

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<sup>8</sup> For example, Jarle Simensen (1974) points out that in the first half of the twentieth century, the chiefs and royal families were often aligned with colonial administrators while the *asafo* companies represented the commoners and were instrumental in the independence movement in the 1950s in alliance with the coastal intellectuals.

access to external funding from government or NGOs, and political influence in Moree in general. Since the majority of the population in Moree make a living out of fishing and fish trade, people with influential positions in the fisheries permeate all power structures.

This is the case also in two new political arenas that have appeared in More in the 1990s. To meet the donors' requirements for more democratisation, Ghana's political and administrative structures have been decentralised. While each town formerly was represented in the District Assembly by government appointed members of the local CDRs (Committees in Defence of the Revolution), each town now send representatives from their own "local parliaments", or Town Councils<sup>9</sup>. Although government funding is limited, the Town Council functions as a link between the government and the local community in the implementation of national policies.

With inspiration from co-management strategies in Southern African fisheries (see Sverdrup-Jensen and Raakjær Nielsen 1998), and with funding from the World Bank, community-based fisheries management (where the idea is a shared responsibility between the state and the community), has been introduced in both inland and marine fisheries in Ghana since 1996. Moree was the first coastal community where a Community Based Fishery Management Committee (CBFMC) was introduced. Out of the fifteen members of the committee, four belong to the *apofohene*'s board of elders, the *konkohene* is a member, and the rest are either canoe owners or "educated". The co-management programme in Moree has already achieved some results in improvement of beach hygiene and in regulation of dynamite fishing (see Koranteng 2000). As these issues are not very controversial in the local community, the *apofohene* and other local institutions have given the CBFMC their full support. However, it is not very likely that the CBFMC will have much of an impact in fisheries management issues where more is a stake and where the already existing local political system is "in charge".

As in the case of the local democracy reforms, the co-management policy does not provide much funding at the local level. Any results from these reforms therefore depend on voluntary work and collaboration with local institutions. For example,

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<sup>9</sup> Moree is part of Abura Asebu Kwamankesi Assembly (AAK). The Town Council in Moree has 22 members, out of which 6 are women. None of the District Assembly representatives from Moree are women, but many women participate at the lowest administrative level, in the six Unit Committees (two in each *asafo* area). The Town Council is administrating health, schools, and the police. Modest revenues are collected through registration of fishing licences, licences for commerce, market fees, property rates and other individual taxes.

according to the Chairman of the Town Council, the influence of the 14 police officers in Moree is very limited: “There are places in Moree where they cannot go. If they do, people will kill them. This is one important reason why the *asafo* companies play an important role in keeping crime down”. Likewise, the ban on dynamite fishing introduced by the CBFMC is efficient only because the *apofohene* decided to apply his own measures with religious sanctions that he knew would work in this context. What happened was the following:

The Moree *apofohene* attended a conference organised by the Directorate of Fisheries in Accra for all chief fishermen in Ghana where the problem of dynamite fishing was discussed. It was concluded that the chief fishermen had to find ways to sanction the use of dynamite and cyanide which, it was said, especially young fishermen were using<sup>10</sup>. Back in Moree, the *apofohene* discussed with his board of seven elders what could be done, and they decided to combine the order from the Directorate of Fisheries to licence the fishermen with their own religious sanctions. The canoe owners were mobilised, and in an elaborate ritual in 1997, all canoe owners with their crews gathered on the beach. Each of them had to provide a bottle of schnapps to be used for the pouring of libation. On behalf of him- or herself and all crew members, each canoe owner swore an oath to the God Almighty (*Onyame*), to the Sea God (*Bosompo*), the God of Thunder and Lightning (*Osor Nyansrama*) and the Earth God (*Efua*) promising that they would not use dynamite, cyanide or DDT. All canoe owners who did this were provided with identity cards (for which they paid) for themselves and their crew members. Without this card a fisherman could be accused of using dynamite and be fined. More efficient, however, was the fact that everyone now agreed that fishing with poison or dynamite would be very dangerous for those who had sworn the oath. The consequence would be, as the *apofohene* put it: “Thunder and lightning will strike your canoe and drown all the crew members, and if you keep dynamite in your room, thunder and lightning will strike there too and destroy it”. This event led to a total stop in dynamite fishing in Moree, and the idea is to repeat the ritual annually.

Two points are illustrated by this narrative. Firstly, although this is not the main topic of this paper, it illustrates that co-management is possible when there are local institutions recognised by the state with so much legitimacy among local fisherman that it can sanction illegitimate behaviour. Success in co-management therefore depends very much on a shared perception of the importance of specific management measures. Thus, whereas people in Moree generally agree that dynamite fishing is a

bad thing, neither fishermen nor the *apofohene* think it is a good management measure to increase the mesh sizes of their nets above the minimum 75 mm nor the proposed ban on the use of beach seines (see Koranteng 2000:49). Since such measures would threaten fishermen's livelihood (and probably not make much sense from a conservation point of view either), it is rather predictable that a co-management strategy in the implementation of such regulations will not succeed.

Secondly, and of more relevance for the topic of this paper, the oath swearing event illustrates the political influence of the *apofohene* institution. The legitimacy of this institution is maintained through the *apofohene*'s constant demonstration of his ability to work in the interest of the fishermen. In Moree (as in many other coastal Fante towns) there is an ongoing struggle between various fractions within the three *asafo* companies, some receiving the support of the *omanhene* (chief), others mobilising through political parties. The primary aim of these "contestants" is to become recognised by the Fisheries Department and other agencies as worthy of external support. At stake is also political influence in Moree in general as well as desires for personal prestige through the support of fishermen. The founding myth of Moree is often activated by all parties to claim legitimacy in this local political discourse. However, as long as the present *apofohene* is recognised by the state, and he does a good job, there is little chance for others to challenge his legitimacy among the fishermen.

The *apofohene*'s responsibility to work in the interest of the fishermen stretches far beyond Moree. He travels extensively, not only to governmental offices, NGOs and import companies; he also travels widely to fishing communities with migrants from Moree (as far as I know, seldom beyond Ghana's borders). Although the Moree *apofohene* cannot physically be present in all migrant communities, his authority can reach the migrants through his own messengers and through collaboration with both migrants' leaders and local leaders of the host community.

As the "mapping" of the institutional landscape of Moree showed, the "traditional" institutions represent some values that are valid in many aspects of life: the primary importance of the lineage, gender duality (socially, economically and politically), respect for the elders, negotiation as conflict resolution. This value system does not merely represent abstract ideals: it structures peoples perceptions about duties and rights in relation to each other, in relation to natural resources, and in relation to people they interact with when they migrate. Let me now describe how fisher

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<sup>10</sup> One informant maintained that fishermen in Moree learned how to use explosives for fishing in



migrants organise their migration trips and the communities in which they stay and work. Not surprisingly, the migrants organise themselves and find solutions to problems based on what they know from home.

## 5. Fisheries migration and diffusion of local institutions

### 5.1. Migration in Ghana

When a canoe company goes on *adoom* (migration) and arrives in a new location in Ghana, the crew must report to the chief fisherman in the area and pay a token fee. The migrants are asked about which town they come from and of which *asafo* company they are members. In this way the host community can report back to the right people in the migrant's home town in case the migrant has a serious problem, like an accident at sea, and – importantly – when migrants misbehave in the host community. The permission from the host *apofohene* provides fisher migrants with the right to land their catch and to stay in the host community.

In Moree the wives of the members of a canoe company are entitled to buy the catch. Notably, the canoe owner's wife acts as their wholesaler (a female canoe owner acts in this role herself): She negotiates the price of the total catch according to the day's "beach price" and then re-sells it at a higher price to the crew members' wives on credit. But in a migrant context it is the local women who are entitled to this position. Therefore, an important contact person for migrants is their fish wholesaler: the *maame nyi* ("mammy selling fish")<sup>11</sup>. Migrants are usually approached by local women who offer them a place to stay as well as credit facilities. The canoe company chooses one of the women, and as part of the agreement she is entitled to buy their catch.

Interestingly, there is a difference in the mode of disposal of fisher migrants' catch according to which fishing gear the canoe company is using. When the canoe is fishing with the *adii* (large drift nets/surrounding nets also known as *ali* and *ashaqwan*), the above mentioned arrangement prevails. Not even when the Moree migrating canoe owner is a woman, is she allowed to be the wholesaler for her own canoe company; she will have to "buy the fish back" from the local *maame nyi*. When fishermen from Moree go on an *ashaqwan* trip, they normally stay away for only two

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Axim, where explosives were sold to them by people who got them from the gold mines in Obuasi.

<sup>11</sup> *Maame nyi* ("mammy selling fish") and *enam nyi* ("woman selling fish") as in Chapter 4.1. are used interchangeably.

to six weeks. Because of the limited permanence of the stay (the *ashaqwan* companies may land fish in several locations) and because the profit potential for the wives of the crew is reduced by the fish selling monopoly of the local women, the crew do not bring wives with them on these trips.

Some companies come back to the same *maame nyi* time after time and year after year. Migrants thus provide women with fish supply, which seasonally boost fish trade in the host community. This is of course also the case when migrants land fish in Moree. However, in the case of Moree, out-migration is much more frequent than in-migration, and the major part of the catches in Moree are landed by their own canoes.

When canoe companies migrate with *tenga* set nets, the disposal of the catch follows a different system than on an *ashaqwan* trip. A *tenga* company consists of an owner of the canoe and some of the nets, and he is usually joined by one or two net owners who fish from his canoe. A few crew members are hired in addition. According to this system, the wives of the canoe owner, net owners, and the crew join their husbands in order to cook, and to process and sell the fish each husband is entitled to according to how many nets he owns. The canoe owner's wife is of course entitled to buy more fish than the net owners' and crew members' wives, since her husband is entitled to the share of the catch which is allocated to the canoe (and the motor, if he owns it). A *tenga* fishing migration trip normally lasts from four to six months, and local women allow the migrant women to process and trade.

When canoe companies bring along both types of nets, and fish with the *tenga* until they find out that it is time to try the *ashaqwan*, the fish caught with the *ashaqwan* cannot be bought by their own wives (unless a special arrangement is made with the *maame nyi*). If these rules are violated, either by migrants or locals, complaints can be addressed to the leaders of fishermen and fish traders in the host community.

In the most established migrant communities, such as Axim, Aboadze and Nyesia, where migrants from Moree have been coming for many generations, there are quite large and permanent settlements of people from Moree. There are also permanent settlements of fisher people from other Fante towns, such as Komenda and Shama, and from other ethnic groups. The migrant communities establish their own "replicas" of the local institutions that they have at home. For example, in Aboadze there is both a Moree *apofohene* and *konkohene*. As in Moree, each of them have a *beesonfo* (board of seven people). The task of these institutions is to represent the Moree migrants in relation to the host community, and to solve conflicts that involve people from Moree. In conflicts between Moree migrants and the local population of Aboadze, the

*apofohene* of the migrants from Moree negotiates with the Aboadze *apofohene*. He can also negotiate with representatives of other fisher migrants in Aboadze.

In a way, the *apofohene* and *konkohene* of the migrants from Moree in Aboadze are also representatives of the *apofohene* and *konkohene* in Moree: If they face problems in the migrant settlement that are too complicated to be solved there and then, they can call the *apofohene* (or the *konkohene* in cases involving traders) from Moree for assistance. Migrants can also get access to outboard motors through the *apofohene* of their home town. The *apofohene* in Moree is thus not only the leader of people who live in Moree but also of migrant fishermen originating from Moree. Even when migrants have not visited their home town for ten or twenty years (which would be very rare in any case), Moree is still their ancestral town, with which social, economic, cultural and emotional links are maintained. Festivals and funerals are the most important events for maintenance of such links, and people travel long distances to participate.

In this regard the *asafo* companies and religious leaders are important. The Bentsir No. 1, Alata No. 2 and Nkum No. 3 *asafo* companies all have *safohenes* in the permanent migrant settlements, who regularly attend *asafo* meetings in Moree. These *safohene* also co-operate with *asafo* companies of the same number as their own in the migration host community. Thus, even if *asafo* leaders in Moree say that they do not mix *asafo* matters with fisheries matters and that “We travel to work [fish] not [in order to perform] *asafo*”, the presence of institutions that resemble those at home, and the regulations, conflict solving mechanisms, norms, customs and rituals that accompany them, ensures that Moree fishermen and women can maintain their identity wherever they go or settle within the field of Fante fisheries in west Africa. As Odotei (1991d) writes about permanent migrants: “Wood and thatch have given place to cement block buildings, they also have their own chief and perform Fante customary rites, reminding themselves of their history through traditional *asafo* songs when the occasion demands” (Ibid:171).

To sum up, duties, rights, and access to resources (fish), is regulated by institutionalised mechanisms in both home and migrant communities, and the system is “monitored” by local leaders in both locations. Although resource access and political authority is always contested, the institutions in Moree, in the Moree “satellite” communities and the institutions in the host communities largely share norms about right and wrong behaviour and duties and rights in fishing and marketing. These institutions make co-existence between migrants and locals possible, also when there is competition, such as among migrant and local fish traders.

In most cases such co-existence has proved to be economically advantageous for both migrants and host community: Migration – whereby people locate themselves in the right place at the right moment – makes it possible to harvest a larger proportion of the herring (*sardinella aurita*) that temporarily shoal to the coast every year.

## **5.2. International migration**

Ghanaian fisheries migrants abroad organise themselves largely in the same way as when they migrate in Ghana. Migrants abroad mostly live in ethnically uniform clusters, either in separate communities or as enclaves of multi-ethnic settlements, where they establish their own political systems through an adaptation of the organisational forms they have at home to the external and internal challenges they face in the foreign context. As in Ghana, the “traditional” institutions play an important role in disciplining migrants’ behaviour and securing their rights according to their own sets of rules. However, when need arises in relation to the host community or host government, specific ethnic identities are combined into one Ghanaian national identity.

While migrants of various ethnic origin seldom interfere in another group’s internal matters (unless it is a matter that threatens the image of Ghanaians as a whole), it is important that they are able to co-operate and appear as one group in relation to host governments: Their hosts do not necessarily differentiate between various groups of Ghanaian migrants according to ethnicity or occupation. The multi-ethnic nature of the Ghanaian community abroad and its need for representation in relation to foreign governments, is reflected in the way migrants organise themselves. For example, in Cotonou in Benin, the Ghanaian fishermen elected a Fante as their chief. When the women elected their “queen”, they decided to elect an Ewe woman. But in the boards of both the chief and the queen, there are thus two members from each of the ethnic groups: two Ga, two Fante and two Ewe representatives. This system of representation ensures that migrants 1) can be aided by a negotiator from their own ethnic group (and gender) in internal matters, 2) have negotiators from both (or all) ethnic groups in conflicts involving Ghanaian migrants of differing ethnic origins, and 3) are represented (in collaboration with the Ghanaian ambassador) by leaders who stand for all Ghanaians irrespective of ethnic origin.

Even if the impact of West African states on flows of migration and on migrants’ economic activities is limited, a host state’s attitude and policy towards fishing migrants clearly has an impact on migrants’ choice of destination. As mentioned,

migrants from Moree have particularly well established communities and institutions in Sassandra and Abidjan. When violent conflict broke out among the Ghanaians and Ivorians in Sassandra, the message from the Ivorian government was clear: Military police forces were sent to Sassandra to control the situation. Then the Ghanaian fishermen were given petrol in order to get out of the place with their canoes as quickly as possible (they either went back to Ghana or to other Ghanaian communities in the Ivory Coast), and the women were sent across the border to Ghana in buses. Since the Ghanaians left Sassandra, nobody else was fishing there, and in their absence the business community (including large numbers of migrant traders from Mali, Chad and Burkina Faso and various parts of the Ivory Coast) was affected by low activity<sup>12</sup>.

After three to four months, many of the Moree migrants therefore felt that it was time to go back to Sassandra and try to rebuild their houses and start fishing. Some of the fishing companies had lost their canoes in the conflict, and were working on their networks in Moree to establish enough credit to buy a new canoe in order to go back to Sassandra. They were fully aware that there was no point in waiting for the economic compensation that the Ghanaian government had promised to demand from the Ivorian government. Primarily because of the economic importance of the migrant fishermen in Sassandra, Ivorian authorities were negotiating with the Ghanaian chief and chief fisherman in Sassandra, as well as with their representatives in the Ghana House of Chiefs and the Embassy in Abidjan, to stabilise the situation so much that fish, processing and trade could ensue.

One of the fishermen we met in Moree in May 1999 who planned to go back to Sassandra, was Kofi Ata. He is the *fie panyin* (elder of house) of a *fie* (house) in Moree called Sassandra. The name is painted on the white house in a bright blue colour together with a drawing symbolising the motto of their lineage. Kofi Ata was born in 1931. After migrating to Aboadze for some seasons, Kofi Ata went to Sassandra for the first time at the age of eighteen in 1949. He worked for his uncle on the canoe Captain Johnson, and he stayed in Sassandra for 15 years before he visited Moree. Nevertheless, already in 1951 his uncle's canoe company in Sassandra in collaboration with relatives at home started building the house Sassandra in Moree. His uncle's company regularly sent a representative to Moree with money to supervise the building of the house. The company also built two houses in Sassandra, which are smaller than the one they built in Moree. These houses were burned down by the Ivorians in the recent conflict, and their canoe was also demolished. As Kofi

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<sup>12</sup> According to the Sassandra *apofohene*'s (who is from Elmina) secretary (who is from Moree) there

Ata put it: “We are now waiting here in Moree while we raise money for new equipment. We definitely intend to go back. We do not want to go to other places, since we are so well established in Sassandra”.

Other migrants felt differently about going back to Sassandra. They felt that the conflict was the last straw that made them look for opportunities in other countries than the Ivory Coast. One of these migrants, Kwame, described his experiences there as: “Just papers, papers, papers”. First a migrant must obtain a Carte de sejour (residence permit) at 15,000 CFA from the Ivorian immigration authorities, and then a Carte d’Identité (identity card) at 2,100 CFA from the Ghanaian Embassy in Abidjan. Then there are, of course, the fees migrants must pay to local authorities in the host community. Even when these formalities are followed, and despite the need for the fish that the migrants produce in the Ivory Coast, they risk great losses due to Ivorian attitudes towards migrants.

Fishermen like Kwame, who works as captain on one of his mother’s four canoes, therefore made a decision of not going back to Sassandra or any other place in the Ivory Coast for some time. When we met Kwame, he was only waiting for his mother’s canoe (at the moment with his brother as captain) to return from an *ashaqwan* trip to Axim, before he would set out and go to Benin. It was five years since the last time his mother had sent a canoe to Cotonou. In Benin, the immigration formalities are much easier than in the Ivory Coast, and there is a well-established Fante community in Cotonou. However, despite less “papers”, and despite previous knowledge of the locality and access to the “services” provided by the Ghanaian fisheries migrant community, Cotonou has one disadvantage: The Beninoise women are so well organised that the Ghanaian women are neither allowed to be wholesalers nor processors of the Ghanaian canoes’ catches. The women who accompany the canoes from Ghana thus only cook and clean for the company. Therefore, to increase the employment opportunities and the profit potential of her company, Kwame’s mother aims to send him with the canoe – and the wives of the company who can process fish and trade – to the Ivory Coast again if the situation improves. As Kwame’s mother put it: “I am not scared of sending them back. As I always say; if you have had an accident with a car, will you never travel with a car again?”. Her statement illustrates the Moree attitude towards migration fairly well: The gains are worth the risk.

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are about 10,000 Ghanaians in Sassandra, out of which roughly 1,000 are from Moree.

This paper is based upon on data collected among fishermen and traders in Moree who have migrated. A more thorough analysis of political institutions, income generation activities, investment patterns, and social, economic and environmental problems among migrants abroad would have required fieldwork in one or more migration destinations in Ghana and the countries where Fante migrants are presently known to be fishing (see Map 2).

One very important research question is to establish and quantify the importance of capital accumulated in migrant networks for the investment in new technology and equipment in Ghanaian canoe fisheries. Based on the literature and on our interviews with fishermen and traders on the importance of migrants' remittances for their investment in fishing equipment, there is good reason to believe that migration plays an important role for the continues importance of the canoe sector as compared with the industrial fishery sector in Ghana, both in terms of employment and fish landings<sup>13</sup>.

Another interesting research question concerns the extent to which fisheries migration has shaped local management practices in Ghana. It is for example very possible that instead of viewing the existence of replicas of "traditional" institutions in migrant communities as a result of "export" through a diffusion process starting in towns of origin, one could see the evolvement of local management institutions in the fisheries as an oscillating process. In such a perspective, the cultural influence, practical experience, consumption habits, and so forth, that migrants return with, and the need to deal with in- and out migration locally in the management of the fisheries, can be seen as important "shaping" factors in the institutional development of Ghanaian fishing communities.

Whereas more research is needed to answer such questions at the sector and regional level, this paper together with Bortei-Doku Aryeetey (2000) and Koranteng (2000) shows the importance of migration at community level. In the present analysis it has been pointed out that Fante fisheries migration is both a production-, accumulation- and a resource management strategy. Migration cannot be seen as primarily a response to population or environmental crisis, but as a strategy for utilisation of fishing and market niches beyond the local community. Through seasonal and long-term movements, it has been possible to sustain an increasing number of fishermen and traders from Moree, both in Moree itself and beyond. This has largely enhanced

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<sup>13</sup> For example, canoes landed 215,659 tonnes of fish in Ghana in 1997 compared with a total of 80,096 tonnes landed by the inshore-, industrial-, shrimp- and tuna vessels together (statistics by the Fisheries Research Division in Tema 1997).

the well-being of the population of Moree who have benefited from the economic returns of fisheries migration. Without migration, an importance source of investment and working capital in the fisheries would disappear, and with the present lack of alternative sources of income, the economic viability of fishing in Moree would be threatened.

## 6. Conclusions

Moree fisheries and its network of migrants in West Africa was here understood as a social field, whose institutions are key to an understanding of fisher people's livelihood strategies. By following rules and norms for behaviour that to a large degree are shared in both home community and migration community – institutionalised in the chief system, in the fishermen and traders' leader institutions, through *asafo* companies, and through kinship and marriage practices – migrants are able to participate in social and political arenas where access to resources is negotiated. At the same time they constantly shape the institutions through negotiation of practices in new contexts. The institutions also function as important "buffers" in the potentially uneasy relationship between migrants and host communities.

One consequence of analysing fishing communities as fields where social relations extend in space is that they cannot be understood as bounded entities. Flows of capital, labour and information circulate in networks that cannot be mapped in one single locality. The networks often extend to other localities in the field of fishing, and often also to other intersecting fields (for example through relatives who work in other sectors of the economy, or through connections with the government). In this perspective, our understanding of fishermen's utilisation of marine resources as well as our interpretation of local demographic trends in a community like Moree must be analysed in a wider context.

Therefore, when canoe surveys show that the number of canoes in Moree has declined from 328 in 1989 to 256 in 1997, and that the number of fishers has declined from 3,695 to 2,571 during the same time span (Koranteng 2000:7), there is reason to be cautious in the interpretation of the situation. It is reported that Moree's share of the national and regional number of canoes has decreased. Not surprisingly, considering the reduced numbers of canoes, the landings of fish in Moree have also declined in the latter half of the 1990s (Ibid:43). Based on what we know about the organisation of



Moree fisheries, there are several possible interpretations of the declining landings of fish and declining number of canoes located in Moree:

1. Due to population growth in Moree, the fishing grounds of Moree are overfished, and the number of canoes is declining because fishing is becoming a viable alternative for fewer and fewer people.
2. Because of overfishing by the foreign industrial fleet the artisanal fishery cannot be sustained, and therefore the number of canoes in Moree is declining.
3. Because of the structural adjustment policies adopted by the Ghanaian government, costs of living and the purchasing power among consumers in the main markets for fish from Moree has declined. The number of canoe owners who can afford to replace their gear, and purchase new canoes and motors is therefore declining.
4. The fish resource situation is better at the moment in other areas along the Ghanaian coast than in the waters near Moree, and therefore an increasing number of Moree canoe companies have migrated and are registered in other regions. According to this interpretation, the number of canoes owned by people from Moree has not declined, but they are located elsewhere.
5. Because of the high cost of living and of input in the fisheries in Ghana, Moree fishermen and traders migrate to other countries in order to take advantage of favourable petrol prices, exchange rates and markets. This interpretation explains the declining number of canoes in Moree with their location elsewhere (abroad). Their return would depend on developments in the national economy of Ghana, as well as on the political situation in the migrants' destination countries.

Considering the declining number of canoes in Moree, the first explanation of reduced fish landings because of population growth resulting in a pressure on the resource does not make much sense: It is hardly surprising that fish landings go down when numbers of fishers and canoes go down. One would perhaps also have expected to see the fish landings rising again after some years of reduced fishing effort, if a previously high fishing pressure (resulting from population growth) was the main explanation for the decreasing numbers of canoes.

Based on the findings of recent biological surveys referred to in this project (Koranteng 2000), it does not seem reasonable to argue that the marine fishery resource situation in the areas exploited by canoes are in a state of crisis. It seems, rather, that the abundance of fish fluctuates (i.e. in the most important "herring" fishery) and that these processes are closely related to climatic factors and the upwelling phenomenon. Other species come and go, like the trigger fish that shows

signs of returning) and the octopus (which is increasingly being exploited). In such a resource situation, the seasonal and migratory fishing pattern practised by Ghanaian canoe fishermen seems exceptionally well ecologically adapted. One could say that migration in the artisanal sector functions as a mechanism that facilitates resource utilisation when new ecological niches emerge and enables fishermen to increase their harvesting of fish when seasonal and more long term “booms” in the ecological system occur. The technological capacity of the largely internationally owned and heavily capitalised industrial fisheries off the coast of West-Africa, and the destruction of the artisanal fleet’s gear by these vessels when they fish too near the shore, may in fact represent a greater problem in terms of sustainability than the artisanal fishery. The findings from this project thus indicate that a combination of the four last explanations listed above seems more plausible than the “Malthusian view”.

The economic hardships that the Ghanaian population has been living through in the 1990s hit fisher people in two ways: The costs of input in the fisheries (petrol, motors etc.) have become exorbitant, and purchasing power among the majority of consumers in the Ghanaian fish market has declined. Simply put, it has become harder for Ghanaian fishermen to cover the costs involved in the harvesting of fish with the income they can make from selling it. The result has been that several of the canoe owners in Moree who previously owned more than one canoe, now remain with only one or two. Some have also “reverted” to fishing with smaller canoes with sails in combination with the new monofilament net as a way of adapting a less capital intensive fishing method. Moreover, even if we cannot present exact numbers, out-migration seems to have increased in response to the declining profitability in the fishery in Moree. It is thus reasonable to assume that a large number of fishermen and traders from Moree are seeking better opportunities in other markets (both for the purchase of input and for better fish prices in favourable currencies). The economic and political situation in many of the countries to which Ghanaian fishermen migrate seems to limit their opportunities at the moment. However, this is not a problem particularly related to fisheries, but to the economy in general.

Based on the present study, some management implications be pointed out. In the introduction I argued that the institutionalisation of migration as an integral part of the Fante fish production system has resulted in an extremely extensive and flexible utilisation of resources. This flexibility has resulted in a fish production- and employment system that is characterised by resilience in the face of processes like population growth and environmentally or humanly induced variations in fish stocks, political conflict and national economic decline. Ghanaian canoe fisheries at the moment face all of these challenges. At the local level the Moree study has shown that

local institutions are capable of implementing management measures to the extent that they find them sensible. No implementation is possible without the co-operation of the local institutions. The attempts at an improved dialogue between government and fisher people at the local level through their institutions probably has better prospects in Ghana than in most African countries, provided that the potentials of the already existing institutional structure in the fishing communities are fully appreciated and utilised. In this regard the government in collaboration with fisheries biologists, and together with local fisheries managers, have a great challenge in establishing a common understanding of necessary management measures in the canoe sector ought to be. Such a dialogue may have to start with a clarification of the main purpose of fisheries management: Is it the conservation of marine resources, and in that case, is there an ecological rationale for this purpose? Or is the purpose of fisheries management indirectly the regulation of fisher people's activities in a wider economic and political context, and if so, is this an economically sound utilisation of coastal resources?

If the government wants to maintain fisheries as an important provider of protein rich food at the domestic market, and as an important source of employment and income in the future, it may be more important to shift the focus in fisheries management to the processes that lie beyond the influence of local fishermen and management institutions than to concentrate on the control of mesh sizes and banning of beach seines in the artisanal sector. Given that the canoe fishery largely adapts its level of activity to the resource situation (through migration and through adaptation of fishing effort), and given that it is very unlikely that the canoe sector will expand uncontrollably in the present economic situation in the country, the limited resources available for governments in the implementation of regulations, monitoring and control could be better spent on management of the industrial and international fishing fleet. Finally, an important factor that enhances the viability of fishing as a livelihood for the coastal population, is for Ghana – to the extent that it is possible – to maintain good relations with her neighbouring countries.

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# Summary

The fishery of the Fante town Moree in Ghana and its network of migrants in West Africa is here understood as a social field, whose institutions are key to an understanding of fisher people's livelihood strategies. By following rules and norms for behaviour that to a large degree are shared in both home community and migration community – institutionalised in the chief system, in the fishermen and traders' leader institutions, through *asafo* companies, and through kinship and marriage practices – migrants are able to participate in social and political arenas where access to resources is negotiated. At the same time they constantly shape the institutions through negotiation of practices in new contexts. The institutions also function as important “buffers” in the potentially uneasy relationship between migrants and host communities.

It is argued that the outcome of a spatially extensive but institutionally efficient migratory production system such as the Fante fisheries, is an extremely flexible utilisation of resources, which is well adapted to the West African ecological, economic and political environment. Furthermore, it is suggested that because of this flexibility, Ghanaian canoe fisheries is both socially and ecologically a particularly resilient system. This explains its ability to adapt to and absorb resource fluctuations, population increase, and economic and political shocks in the region.